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News Release



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Seeks Comments on Idaho's Request To Manage Wolves North of Interstate-90

30-day comment period opens as federal agency begins environmental review

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is beginning an environmental review of the State of Idaho's request for a permit to manage gray wolves in the Idaho Panhandle north of Interstate-90, where the gray wolf is federally protected as an endangered species.

The Service will accept comments from the public until July 3, 2006. Individuals and organizations that commented in response to the January 10, 2006, Federal Register notice of receipt of the state's permit application do not need to comment again unless they wish to provide new information on the permit application or environmental analysis.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) is requesting a permit to lethally "take" (harass by survey, capture, handle, collar, take blood samples, relocate, sacrifice, and release) the gray wolf in conjunction with wolf management activities in Idaho north of Interstate-90 for the purpose of enhancing the species' survival. If issued, the permit - known as a 10(a)(1)(A) recovery permit - would authorize IDFG to monitor wolf populations and coordinate non-lethal and lethal control actions to reduce wolf conflicts with livestock and dogs. These actions are currently coordinated by the Service. The permit would not affect ongoing wolf management in the rest of Idaho, where wolves are classified as a non-essential experimental population.

The Service will conduct its analysis of Idaho's permit request in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). If issued, the permit would authorize IDFG to manage wolves in the same manner that the Service has in the years since the Service's 1999 Interim Wolf Control Plan for Northwestern Montana and the Panhandle of Northern Idaho was adopted for northern Idaho. No additional environmental impacts to wolves are expected beyond those already analyzed in the Service's environmental analysis on wolf management activities including the Service's 1988 Environmental Assessment, the Service's 1999 Environmental Action Memorandum, and the Control Plan. However, due to changes in the gray wolf's biological status since 1999 (increased numbers), we are now initiating a new analysis under NEPA. The recovery goal for Idaho, 10 breeding pairs and 100 wolves, has been exceeded with 36 breeding pairs documented and an estimated 512 resident wolves living in Idaho by the end of 2005. The Service considers wolves to be biologically recovered in Idaho.

Under NEPA, a range of alternatives to a proposed project must be developed and considered in an environmental review. The purpose of this review is to evaluate the potential impacts of alternatives for managing conflicts with wolves in Idaho

north of Interstate 90. Management actions would be intended to protect livestock and pets and to conserve wolf populations. The proposed action is to issue IDFG a permit authorizing the use of lethal wolf management techniques when deemed necessary. An alternative will be selected and a decision made on permit issuance after comments are considered and analysis is complete.

IDFG's application and other information relevant to wolf permits are available for review, subject to the requirements of the Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act, by any party who submits a request for a copy of such documents to the address below, or calls 503-231-2063. The State of Idaho Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, the Interim Wolf Control Plan for Northwestern Montana and the Panhandle of Northern Idaho, and the IDFG permit application can be found at: <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/ecoservices/endangered/recovery/GrayWolfManagement.htm>.

Additional information about wolf recovery and conservation in the northwestern United States, including control of problem wolves, can be found in various reports at: <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov/>.

Written data or comments should be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chief, Endangered Species, Ecological Services, 911 NE. 11th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97232-4181 (fax: 503-231-6243). Please refer to "Northern Idaho Wolf Permit Analysis" when submitting comments. All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the official administrative record and may be made available to the public.

On March 9, 1978, the Service published a rule that listed the gray wolf as endangered throughout the conterminous 48 States and Mexico, except for Minnesota, where they were reclassified as threatened. On November 22, 1994, the Service designated areas in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming as non-essential experimental populations in order to initiate gray wolf reintroduction projects in central Idaho (south of I-90) and the Greater Yellowstone Area. In 1995 and 1996, wolves were reintroduced from Canada to central Idaho and the Greater Yellowstone Area. No wolves were reintroduced north of I-90 where they have remained listed as endangered.

Idaho currently has a Service-approved wolf management plan. A Memorandum of Agreement was signed between the Department of the Interior and the State of Idaho on January 5, 2006, to transfer management of wolves in the experimental, non-essential population, (which occurs south of I-90) to the State. That population of wolves is protected under the Endangered Species Act as a threatened species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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